

## **FishTales from New Bedford's Working WaterFront Festival, September 28-29, 2013**

Voices from the Fisheries and the Social Sciences Branch along with our partner, the Working Waterfront Festival, co-hosted FishTales, an oral history booth during the Festival on September 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Over 20 interviews were collected this year, adding depth to the FishTales collection in VFF. These interviews will be added to VFF bringing the total number of interviews collected to over 45 during the past two years.

Laura Orleans, Festival Director, says, *"The Working Waterfront Festival has been collecting oral histories of the commercial fishing community since 2004. The Voices from the Fisheries Project has provided us with a repository for our collection which can now be accessed by people from across the globe. More recently, through our partnership with VFF, we were able to pilot a new approach to this documentation effort, collecting short personal experience narratives from fishermen and others on the docks during the Festival at our FishTales booth. This method has been highly successful, enabling us to reach a broad cross section of the industry including retired and active fishermen representing a variety of gear types, positions, ages and ethnic backgrounds; fishermen's wives; and workers from a variety of support industries. We were also able to identify a larger cross section of potential interviewees, many of whom can now be more fully documented."*

In contrast to the longer, traditional oral histories, these FishTales are often related to extraordinary events and experiences rather than day-to-day life in the industry. We also conducted ten interviews focused on daily life experiences and the impact of regulatory changes for deck hands. These longer interview sessions allow for more in-depth conversations with targeted interview subjects (i.e., working crew, retired fishermen who are older and/or in frail health).

SSB staff also used this opportunity to interact with fishermen and other festival participants about SSB activities. Given the reliance of the Branch on the participation of fishermen and other industry participants in the production of social science data (via surveys, interviews, etc...), we felt this was an important opportunity to speak with and get feedback from participants about our work.

The VFF project has benefited from its' partnership with the Working Waterfront Festival since its' beginning. The Festival helped conceptualize the original project design, contributing multiple oral history collections (115 oral history interviews to date) over the years, and creating podcasts for the VFF website. The vast majority of the Festival interviews have been conducted within the context of the Festival, an annual event celebrating the culture of commercial fishing.

The commercial fishing industry in the northeast is undergoing rapid and significant change. This documentation effort is particularly critical at this time, capturing a way of life that is rapidly disappearing and chronicling the impact of these changes on the people who work in the commercial fishing industry.